



Rep. Henry A. Waxman
H.R. 3685, Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2007
November 7, 2007

Mr. Speaker. I rise in strong support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or ENDA. This legislation is long overdue. Prejudice has no place in the workplace.

Nearly ten years ago, the federal government set a bold example when President Clinton issued an executive order specifically outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation in the federal government. Today, twenty-two states, the District of Columbia and more than 180 cities and counties nationwide have enacted laws prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace. I am proud that my home state of California and my congressional district in Los Angeles have played a leading role in the effort to promote understanding, acceptance, tolerance, and equality for gay Americans.

But congressional leadership is sorely needed to set a national standard for this fundamental civil rights protection. The health of our democracy requires that all Americans be entitled to justice. Civil rights and human rights should not stop at state boundaries.

Like many civil rights battles before it, the fight for gay rights has been long, arduous, and frustrating. In recent years, we have faced many setbacks with anti-gay initiatives by President Bush and Republicans in Congress that serve only to fan the flames of intolerance and bigotry.

The tide is turning. Earlier this year the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate achieved victories with hate crimes legislation that would criminalize attacks against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. With the passage of ENDA, we will push further by making it illegal to fire, refuse to hire, or deny a promotion to an individual on the basis of sexual orientation.

As an original cosponsor of H.R. 2015, a more comprehensive version of this legislation, I am disappointed that H.R. 3685 does not protect against discrimination based on gender identity. I strongly support the amendment Representative Baldwin will offer to include gender identity in H.R. 3685 and if that amendment is not adopted, I pledge to work for an ENDA that includes gender identity.

I look forward to passing this landmark legislation, which is a great leap forward for equal rights.